DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 073 503 CS 500 169

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TITLE Growing Up from Another Perspective: The Countermovement.
PUB DATE Dec 72
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Assn. (58th, Chicago, December 27-30, 1972)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Attitudes; Conflict; *Females; *Feminism; *Organizations (Groups); Persuasive Discourse; Political Issues; *Rhetoric; *Rhetorical Criticism; Sex Discrimination; Social Problems; Social Values

ABSTRACT

The countermovement to the women's liberation movement has been varied both in origin and organization and has been slow in making its impact. Presented in this paper is an analysis of several countermovement strategies which focus upon the issues of opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment, abortion law reform, and arguments about the nature of woman. The rhetoric of countermovement organizations such as Pussycats, Females Cpposed to Equality, and Happiness of Womanhood is examined and discussed in relation to these issues. The issues of argument validity, the extent to which the rhetors of the countermovement understand and refute the arguments advanced by the movement women, identifying the dominant strategies for gaining publicity, and converting potential members to the ideals of the countermovement are analyzed by the author. It is concluded that by attacking superficial failures of the movement, exaggerating and misinterpreting movement issues, and misunderstanding what American women want and think, the countermovement has failed to come to grips with the essence of the movement. (Author/LG)

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GROWING UP FROM ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE: THE COUNTERMOVEMENT

Presented at the 1972 SCA Convention Chicago, Illinois

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Opposition to the Women's Movement ranges from a deliberate silence to organized campaigns to stop ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment. It comes from a variety of individuals who have serious misgivings about Women's Liberation; we are all familiar with articles or books from such prominent individuals as Dr. Mead, Midge Decter, Ann Landers, and Norman Mailer. But when this opposition coalesces and responds to the goals, behavior, and ideology of the Movement, it is an organized Countermovement. Rather than evaluating the scattered oppostion to the Women's Movement, this paper is an overview of the language, strategies, and principles of the active and potentially powerful countermovement against Women's Liberation.

If a countermovement is a rhetorical reaction to a movement, it must reject and negate; but in order to be a movement, it must also accept and affirm. To what, then, does the Countermovement say no?

It says no to unrestricted abortion, to the Equal Rights Amendment (hereafter referred to as ERA), to federal day care centers, to women's studies courses that ignore their perspective, to the unbecoming behavior of the women in the Movement, to the godlessness of the Movement, and to the concept of woman as man's equal.

It says yes to man as guide, protector, and provider and woman as wife, mother, and homemaker. It says yes to feminine charm, to the traditional marriage and family style, and bravo to the differences between man and woman.

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Since any movement creates its own short-hand terms to summarize its key constructs, a countermovement counteracts the language of the movement. Thus, we have the deliberate creation of H,O.W. to oppose N.O.W.[1] and Pussycats who "purr" in beguiling contrast to S.C.U.M. and W.I.T.C.H. Femininity rather than feminism; womanhood not sisterhood. Then there is the "true woman" of Midge Decter's New Chastity or the "real female" who can be "liberated and feminine" by adopting the philosophy of the book Purr, Baby, Purr. Women are not discussed as females or people; they are girls.

For the most part, members of the Countermovement label all aspects of the Movement as "the women's lib" or "fem libbers." If one's style represents one's epistemic stance, this labelling represents the Countermovement's inability and/or lack of desire to grasp the differences within the Movement and their preference for viewing all of it as undesirable.

A brief look at the strategies of the Countermovement will also provide information for the longer discussion of why they oppose the ERA and their exposition of the "true woman." Some of the strategies of the Countermovement match those of the Movement. For example, in response to National Women's Day, Happiness of Womanhood (H.O.W.) holds a Womanhood Day at which men judge who is the most feminine, prizes are awarded for the prettiest satin pillows, and sandpaper pillows are given to legislators who have incurred their wrath. They, too, have buttons, bumperstickers, and slogans reading: I know H.O.W.; I am a Pussycat; You make the living and we'll make life worth living; Stop Bitching and start purring; A lamb chop is better than a karate chop. They publish books, distribute newsletters, and testify before legislative committees. However, they hold coffees not conciousness

.raising sessions, get pastors not politicians to aid their cause, endorse God not the self as the best source of authority, and rely on men for a lot of their financial and moral support. While there are differing opinions within the Countermovement, it has not yet provided the wealth of voices and ideas, the questioning, or the conflict of the Movement.

Opposition to the ERA

In her testimony before a Louisiana Senate Committee, chairman (the title she uses) of F.O.E. Babs Minhinnette said:

> Women now enjoy deferential and preferential treatment and have no desire to be lowered to equality. What's wrong with a male dominated society? /It is/ certainly preferable to a Women's Lib Dominated Society run by a few frustrated female sex traitors.[2]

Her comment is just one of 24 reasons for opposing the ERA frequently cited by F.O.E. and H.O.W.[3] Their 24 reasons can be summarized into these three: (1) passage of the ERA denies God's divine plan; (2) it will create far more problems for women than it will solve; and (3) it is unwanted and unnecessary.

No organization has so strongly involved God in the fight to stop the ERA than F.O.E.'s subsidiary Students Opposed to Equality who distributed this "Lesson in Logic" (their title) on campuses last May:

> God, who is superior to man, created man and woman different physically and emotionally. God being perfect made no mistake when he created man and woman different and did not intend for man to try to remake his creation to be the same which means equal....When man tries to make man and woman equal, he is revolting against God....and aligning himself with Satan....If you are not against Satan, you are for him. Conclusion: The ERA is a Satanic Movement; it is anti-nature. [4]

God is not the only source of expert testimony cited; members of H.O.W. and F.O.E. cite opinions of law professors, leaders of labor unions, sociologists, and Senators who suggest that passage of the amendment is "the tonkin Gulf Resolution of the American social structure."[5] They quote Ms. Johnson, Washington Director of the National Urban League, as opposing proposals which could eliminate protective standards for women or adversely affect their economic welfare or "special responsibilities as mothers."[6] Dr. Margaret Mead has said: "I've been against the Equal Rights Amendment always....its passage would endanger the hard won rights of working women--both black and white."[7] One of their champions is Senator San Ervin who, with fellow legislators and legal scholars, says passage of the ERA will mean drafting women, abolition of the female branches of the military, inevitable governmental control over reproduction, and destruction of protective work laws.

While there are serious questions about the implications of the Amendment, F.O.E. and H.O.W. do not develop their arguments; instead they enumerate objections, quote "expert" witnesses, and raise questions like: "What has equality done for the women of Russia and China?"[8]

The third major reason why the Countermovement opposes the ERA is in two parts: (a) it is the work of the "libbers" and therefore doesn't represent the real majority and (b) it is unnecessary. Mrs. Minhinette and Mrs. Davison repeatedly cite a New York Times poll that showed only 3% of the women favoring the ERA; from this unexplained and unverified statistic they conclude that they represent 97% of the women in this country.[9] If their statistic is accurate,

the poll must be old for the recent Redbook survey of 120,0000 readers showed that two out of three women favor the Women's Liberation Movement[10] and a Psychology Today survey last March revealed that a majority support the ERA.[11] There is some truth, though, to the argument that the Women's Movement does not include all women. In an Ebony article black women said that they have more pressing obligations and needs than supporting the Women's Movement,[12] and the Movement has long been criticized for ignoring the poor and the older women.[13]

Even if the Movement represented all of the women, the ERA would be unnecessary argues Jaquie Davison; for sex discrimination is illegal under the 5th and 14th Amendments.[14] While some would say Davison is accurate, the Supreme Court has yet to define woman as "person" and Davison ignores the existing discrimination so thoroughly documented and responds passively: there has been and is some discrimination, but these problems can be solved at the lower echelons of our government."[15]

These words from Minhinette and Davison summarize their reasons for opposing the ERA:

Minhinette

> With the ERA, lesbians and homosexuals could marry freely. Will they next demand the right to adopt chirldren? Our society is built around the family... which is under attack by the women's lib and ratification of the ERA would be the toppling of our society. It will put a government noose around our necks. 16

Davison

> Once the family is gone, it will be Goodbye America![17]

Using the thin-entering wedge, and black or white fallacies, undocumented polls, "expert" testimony, and lists rather than complete

arguments, Happiness of Womanhood and Females Opposed to Equality move against ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment. F.O.E. has been successful in Louisiana; H.O.W. was unsuccessful in California, but only 13 states need to reject the ERA in order to defeat it. The "Stop ERA" movement is gaining attention.[18]

On the Nature of Woman

While the ERA is one of the major points of clash between the Movement and the Countermovement, perhaps the real stasis is their concept of woman. The underpinning for much of the Countermovement's philosophy comes from the lecturer and author Helen Andelin's book Fascinating Womanhood which influenced Davison's I Am A Housewife. According to Andelin, woman is of two qualities: angelic and human. "The angelic is what a woman is, and has to do with her character; and the Human is what a woman does and has to do with her appearance, manner, and actions."[19] Her four angelic qualities are that she (1) understands man (appreciates and accepts him, has pride in his superiority); (2) has deep inner happiness which results from domestic goodness, acceptance of self, and appreciation of life; (3) has a lovely character which comes from all the noble virtues of benevolence, moral courage, chastity, patience, self-dignity, gentleness, and the like; (4) is a domestic goddess by being a good homemaker, a good mother, and happy in her role.[20] Her human qualities are also divided into four categories: femininity in appearance and manner (dresses daintily and speaks softly); radiates happiness by letting her "presence light the home"; has a fresh appearance and manner by having good health and grooming; and displays childlikeness--a quality attained through display of spunkiness, changeability, and

even children's dress if it pleases her man. Both qualities, the reader is assured, are essential to man's "celestial love" for the "angelic arouses in man a feeling approaching worship and brings him peace and happiness" while the human qualities "fascinate, captivate, amuse, enchant, and arouse a desire to protect and shelter."[21]

If this seems removed from the harsher realities of the twentieth century, this is how most of the Countermovement, particularly the organized opposition, views the ideal wo man. Fascinating Womanhood and I Am A Housewife are prescriptive texts that define by essence not operation, cite hypothetical illustrations and personal testimony as proof, reinforce by suggesting rewards that will be reaped if their specific instructions are followed, and list pages of "do's" and "don't's" for the good wife. There are pictures of woman literally divided into an angel and a human; there is a picture of a woman holding the house in her hands. As dreamlike as this is and as much as Christian chivalry is envoked, one wonders if this isn't idolatrous. The inaccurate analogy these two authors imply is: woman is to God as man is to woman. If woman is to be worshipped, she has the awesome but false responsibility of "divinity" and is the real power in male-female rel tions. Andelin and Davison have turned the tables on themselves; they have made woman into a golden calf.

The more realistic Purr, Baby Purr by Lucianne Goldberg and Jeannie Sakol endorses femininity and details the differences between the sexes in two chapters filled with medical evidence and their own discussion that quite thoroughly defeats Ann Koedt's "myth of the vaginal orgasm."[22] They argue that as a sexual being what woman wants is "a good deal more meaningul...than being turned on like a

radio switch. She wants her whole being involved...."[23] They contend that "The feminists are defeated by their own psuedo-scientific approach to sex" and conclude: "Ti-Grace Atkinson and Company may look forward to the joyless,sexless,world she paints--true there would be equality for all, but equality for what?"[24]

While these are provocative thoughts, one cannot be so kind with their affirmation of woman's "flirtility rites" and advice to single women who should get married because "married is better."[25] When they conclude their book with the question: "When does Daddy get to 'freak out'?"[26] they either do not grasp or care to confront the highest ideal of the Movement--human liberation. In fact, one weakness of the Pussycat's philosophy is that while woman is still defined in terms of man, she is described as the subtler, but more witty sex, the ingenious, fun-filled, affectionate manipulator.

What general conclusions can we make about the principles and practices of the organized Countermovement? First, it has problems in coming to grips with the essence of the Movement; it attacks the superfacial failures of the Movement and reveals its exaggeration and misinterpretation by asking such questions as: "Do we want to create a society in which the only way you can tell men and women apart would be to check their I.D. cards?"[27] It presumes to speak for men as well as 97% of the women without concern for research or documentation. Secondly, while the Countermovement's concern for children and happy families is admirable and while its influence is growing and its membership increasing at a time when the Movement is experiencing financial difficulties, there is evidence that the Countermovement misunderstands what American women want and think.

It has not captured the essence of woman when to one part of the Countermovement she is a domestic goddess and to another a feminine beguiler, capable of some intellectual activity, and fulfilled by love and marriage. To both parts, woman is the second sex! Woman is.... well.....Sadie is a married lady.

NOTES

[1]Jaquie Davison, I Am A Housewife (New York: Guild Book, 1972), 36.

[2]V.E. Minhinette (Babs), "Testimony to A Louisiana Senate Legislative Committee," May 18, 1972. Obtained from Minhinette at 10688 Ranchwood Drive, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70815.

[3]V.E. Minhinette, "Stop ERA," Silent Majority V.O.I.C.E. (July, 1972), 1.

[4]Students Opposed to Equality, "Lesson in Logic," May, 1972. Obtained from Mrs. Minhinette.

[5]Jonathan Pincus, Professor of Neurology, "Quotes in Opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment," Memo sent to all Senators from Senator Sam Ervin, Jr. Obtained from Mrs. Minhinette.

[6]Cernonia Johnson, op. cit.

[7]Margaret Mead, op. cit.

[8]Minhinette, "Testimony to A Louisiana Senate Committee."

[9]Jaquie Davison, "Testimony before Penn. Leg. Comm. in Pittsburgh." Also frequently cited in the newletters from H.O.W. Obtained from H.O.W. offices at 4517 Mt. Hubbard Ave., San Diego, CA. 92117. Mrs. Minhinette cites a Roper poll that shows that 7 out of 10 women do not think they are discriminated against; neither woman cites the source.

[10]Carol Tavris and Toby Jayarante,"What 120,000 Young Women Can Tell You About Sec, Motherhood, Menstruation, Housework--and Men," Redbook (January, 1973), 67-69, 127-29, 69.

[11]Carol Tavris, "Woman and Man," Psychology Today (March, 1972), 59-63. Specific statistics were: men--45%; nongroup women--58%; group women--63%.

[12]Helen King, "Black Women and Women's Liberation," Ebony (March, 1971), 69-76.

[13]Myrna Lewis and Robert Butler, "Neglectdd by Women's Lib: Why Elderly Females Need Help Against Discrimination," National Observer (July 29, 1972), 20. This is just one of many articles that speaks to the point.

[14]Davison, "Testimony Before Pennsylvania Leg. Committee."

[15]Ibid.

[16]Minhinette, V.O.I.C.E., op. cit.

[17]Several of Davison's Happiness of Womanhood, Inc. newsletters.

[18]H.O.W., Inc. Newsletter, December, 1972.

[19]Helen Andelin, Fascinating Womanhood (Santa Barbara: Pacific Press, 1963), 31.

[20]Ibid., 216.

[21]Ibid.

[22]Lucianne Goldberg and Jeannie Sakol, Purr, Baby, Purr (New York: Pinnacle Books, 1972), chapters two and three.

[23]Ibid., 59.

[24]Ibid., 62.

[25]Ibid., chapters four and seven.

[26]Ibid., 174.

[27]Ibid.